

XXIII, Interlude: *Mary Magdalen and the extravagance of Mass*

A GLUTTON AND A WINE-TIPPLER, they said, fond of low company. He was invited to a grand luncheon at the palace of Simon, a grand clergyman. He went, and took two friends. There were many courses and many wines. During the fish course a woman, louchely dressed (too many jewels, too much scarlet, not enough cloth), stole into Simon's great dining hall. She ignored Simon; she avoided his appalled glare; she did not approach his table; she crept beneath it. She was carrying an alabaster phial. She cracked this apart. It was full of spikenard, the best perfume on the market. The more sophisticated guests recognised the scent of it at once. It filled the room. She sobbed as if she were in the bitterest pain, and yet as if she was being relieved of all pain. His feet were bare. She took them in her hands and wept over them. Then, when they were thoroughly wet, she yanked her hair free from her glittering head-dress and rubbed them dry with her long, her famous, her spectacularly well-cared-for auburn hair. Once they were dry again she kissed them. Then she poured the best perfume on the market over those feet, and caressed them until there was no oil left, only the aroma and the memory, which will, however, last as long our race lasts on this planet. Not bad, eh? Peerless fragrance, incomparable woman's gallantry, bright tears washing dusty skin, lovely hair stroking clean skin: yes, it is good to hear this. It leaves in the mind the long aftertaste of a complex wine. Sweetness, and tang, and amazement.

Simon, of course, is perfectly horrified at this – this carnal act. *I am a respectable cleric, upright, notoriously blameless – I do not, dear Heavens, have about my rectory, I do not know – goodness gracious me, I hardly know about – women of this variety. No, no. And between my proper dismay and my becoming embarrassment and my distinguished crossness, and my anxiety (for what if my dear congregation hear who crashed my luncheon?) – and disgust, nice nice disgust – and shyness – I cannot, I really cannot think of anything to say. Nothing. Also, there's a certain fluttering*

excitement in my head (why, look here: this young person's costume hardly covers her, er, person. Hardly at all). Dear dear. But at least, well at least, dear me, there is this: no more question in my head about the standing of this personage. Prophet indeed! Esteemed guest indeed! He clearly has no idea what is in the room. He can't even be well-bred. A gentleman would be able to recognise her type. He's actually letting her – no, I shan't look. He's –. It's –

“Simon: I have somewhat to say unto thee.” *Good heavens. He's speaking to me. He's read my thought. Better brace myself:*

“Well, Reverence? Say on.”

“Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little . . .”

And He said to the woman, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”¹

HERE'S A PAINTING of the affair by Dietrich Bouts. The fish course is half-done; someone has been filleting lake-fish very carefully. But there's also an air of ritual to the table. Here is the ultimate Fisher of Men. Here are bread and wine – elemental, suggestive victuals. Simon the Pharisee is ogling in excited distaste the business with the feet. The other Simon, Simon Peter, is, alas, appalled as well, and makes *tut-tut* gestures with his hand and eyes and head. Only young John seems to be struck with the comeliness of her gesture. He has turned to share his thoughts with an anomalous figure: a fifteenth-century Belgian. This is the abstracted Dominican friar who commissioned Bouts' painting. He therefore gets to appear at the edge of it, which is the usual privilege of those who commission religious art. But in this unusual painting, Bouts shows us his patron so overwhelmed that he cannot bring himself to look at the feet, at the table, at the action, and stares off-stage, out of his painting, dumbfounded. – And Christ solemnly blesses her, His eyes gazing inward.

¹ Luke vii:^{44-47, 50}; see also ³⁰⁻⁴³.



A memorial of her.

THE GESTURE WAS STUPEFYING, impressive and extreme. Even Christ Himself was immediately impressed. He declared her act heroic, and prophesied that this deed of her's would achieve such future fame that it would be compounded into the substance of the Faith:

“Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”²

That is to say, the woman's gesture toward Him is now tangled up with the Gospel forever. For the rest of time, whenever Christ is preached, this woman's gesture must be preached too. Wherever Christ's Body is called down and offered again in the Mass, her action will adhere to It, as if the aroma of her spikenard still hung about that Flesh.

What is it about this woman's extravagant exploit that is so perfect and so memorable? To understand that is to understand not just the woman (who after all lived and died twenty centuries ago), but to understand ourselves, and what we are about in Mass. For what the woman did brings us to the core of liturgical worship, and she will (I hope) henceforth regard herself as the patron saint of these feeble notes. For she not only lived and died two thousand years ago, she lived at the time of Life Himself, and shared death with Him, and now shares unbreakable life with Him, speaking to Him forever of love and occasionally, I hope, mentioning us. *Sancta Maria Magdalena: ora pro nobis!*

What we're about.

THESE NOTES, *The Freeze-Frame Mass*, describe the Mass. We are progressing step by step through the ritual of Mass, which comes in five distinct movements: first entry; then Word; then Introit; finally, Sacrament; then aftermath.

Introit and Word lie behind us now. We are about to plunge into the third movement, which leads up to the climax and core of Mass, the action of consecrating, sacrificing, consuming Christ's Flesh.

We paused between the first and second movements, between Introit and Word (if you can remember that far back), to reflect on the nature of ceremonial. This chapter is another interlude, an *entr'acte*, a *cadenza*, between the second and third movements. In this chapter we are dawdling,

² Matthew xxvi¹⁵.

looking about us, wandering to and fro, smelling the flowers and lolling beneath the trees, because the road ahead will rush us forward so quickly, alarmingly, breathlessly up toward the very heights.

Among the uncountable pleasures of attending Mass are these changes of tempo. The first movement of Mass was *allegro non troppo*: we heard the overture and moved to the altar at workmanlike speed. The second movement of Mass, the Word, was of its nature rather static and thoughtful (like a *largo* second movement in a symphony). Christianity's natural exuberance was not entirely thwarted – no one has ever invented a more energetic way to read a book than the Gospel procession at High Mass! But essentially we sat and listened to the reading of the three passages from the Bible; stood to chant together a complex summary of the Faith; and sat to hear a sermon. Now, with the beginning of the third movement, the action is about to speed up and move toward a crescendo. Therefore we have paused in (I hope) thoughtful silence for a few weeks, and are now making a rambling meditation. Next week *allegro*: a gallop.

Extravagance.

OF COURSE *THE FREEZE-FRAME MASS* isn't just a description of Mass as traditionally celebrated in the West. It's also meant as a piece of [propaganda](#), in favour of traditional rites, against the weird, stark replacement liturgies introduced in that deranged decade the 1960s.

I have sneered, and I shall sneer some more, at the ghastly, desolate character of these Modernist rites. That is the negative aim of *The Freeze-Frame Mass* as propaganda. The positive aim is to show that the ancient rites are not repellently ornate, but rich and welcoming. So in this chapter, this gentle interlude, I want us to think about the most controversial aspect of our own beloved ancient rites: I mean their [baroque extravagance](#).

The ceremonies we have been contemplating in these notes are *extremely* extravagant. That's why it's taken us two hundred pages and sixteen chapters to describe them (and we're only up to the offertory). Is this extravagance ludicrous? Has every ceremonial action in the traditional rites been so complicated and decorated that it is over-done and bizarre? Was the Mass before 1960 (as the Modernisers allege) grotesquely, improperly extreme? Does baroque adornment have a place in ritual, or is it a flaw?

We can litigate this question endlessly: it is better to look at a picture. The picture I have in mind is of course the one two pages back, of a certain woman's baroque and lavish gesture. If we can appreciate her act, we have reached the heart of Catholic liturgical sense. If we can appreciate why she

did what she did at the dinner table of Christ, we will know why we act in the same fashion there ourselves. If we can bring ourselves to praise her lush extravagance, we will be ready to contemplate the rites of the climax of Mass, which are very extravagant indeed – more extreme than anything we have seen yet.

Who was that woman with the spikenard?

THE EARLIEST CHRISTIANS inherited this memory: that once, a notorious woman had dared to anoint Jesus with spikenard as He sat at table. St Mark, the first Gospel-writer, retailed the story, leaving this bold woman anonymous, and says that she anointed Christ's head.³

But Christian imagination could not leave alone this story alone. For as Jesus Himself told His disciples,

*adhuc multa habeo vobis dicere sed non potestis portare modo :
cum autem venerit ille Spiritus veritatis docebit vos in omnem
veritatem ille me clarificabit*

*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.
Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into
all truth:*

*for . . . He shall glorify me*⁴

The process of watching Jesus does not begin and end with reading the four Gospels. There were things to say which His disciples could not then bear; it was only when God was within them that they understood how He had been with them. The Church, as she understood Him better more, told stories that were more profound than accurate biographical anecdotes. There are tales we owe to the Spirit of Truth, not to precise records; the Church isn't *naïve* about the nature of these tales. For she extends the bold imaginative process by which Christ Himself pictured Himself as a hen sheltering her chicks,⁵ a burglar breaking into houses at night,⁶ a corrupt judge neglecting a case.⁷

Thus St Luke understood how drastic the woman's gesture *must* have been: in his account she dares to touch Jesus' Body, anointing not His hair but His feet. It is Luke's account I rehearsed at the beginning of this chapter.

³ Mark xiv³⁻¹⁰; Matthew (xxvi⁶⁻¹⁴) follows Mark.

⁴ John xvi^{12-13, 14b}.

⁵ Matthew xxiii³⁷.

⁶ Luke xii³⁹.

⁷ Lukexvii¹⁻⁷.

St John, going still further, realised that the woman who washed Christ's feet could not be just an anonymous 'sinner'. He boldly identified her with one of Jesus' most intimate friends: Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus. This woman wasn't anonymous, she was a notable friend, a friend whom Christ had praised for preferring dotting on Him to busy good work.⁸

And the Western Church (although not the Greek Church) has gone further still. Mediæval Christianity identified this woman, the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair, not only with Lazarus' sister Mary, but with one of Jesus' most important followers and friends: Mary of Magdala, [Mary Magdalen](#) (pronounced in English, by the way, MAUD-lin; Magg-da-LAY-na in Latin languages).

The Magdalen (as she is called, to distinguish her from the too-many first century women called Mary) was one of the wealthy ladies who made the tremendous wanderings of Jesus and His friends possible. These women bankrolled Christ and His entourage, and they arranged the catering. (It is strange that we don't hear more of their very necessary work.)⁹ The Magdalen was brave enough to stand at the foot of the cross when nearly all the disciples had hidden themselves. Most importantly of all, having seen Christ's death and burial, she was – according to some accounts – the first witness of His Resurrection. She was *apostala apostolorum*, apostle (with a feminine ending to the word) to the apostles.¹⁰ Mary Magdalen was thus amongst the greatest of all saints, high in the catalogue of Christian heroes.

Now, why did the mediæval Church think to identify such a triumphant figure as the Magdalen with the self-abasing, foot-washing woman – without any ancient evidence, and indeed rather against the evidence of the New Testament? The cheap answer is that the Church was embarrassed by the fact that Christ had had such an intimate friendship with a woman: this conflated figure, disciple-*cum*-foot-washer, was a caddish attempt by male clerics to tame a strong female hero. This is not true – or rather, it isn't significantly true. Human affairs are always complex, human motivation is always mixed, and no foul motive you care to ascribe to a big cultural development action – such as the creation of the corporate character called Maria Magdalena – is ever *entirely* untrue. There have always been vulgar misogynists in the Church, as there have always been morbid self-haters. But that does not blunt the sharpness of the insight that the Magdalene, *because* she was Christ's most impressive disciple, might well

⁸ Luke x^{41f}.

⁹ Luke viii²⁻³.

¹⁰ Mark xv⁴⁰; Matthew xxvii⁵⁶; John xix²⁵; Luke xxiii⁴⁹. The bogus ending to St Mark's Gospel (xvi⁹) for whatever that is worth, adds that that Christ had cast seven devils out of the Magdalene.

have wept at His feet and smothered them with ointment. For if she was close to Him, she must have worshipped Him intimately and opulently; and the act of the women with the spikenard is the model for all decent, and therefore extravagant, Christian worship.¹¹

Mary versus Simon.

MARY MAGDALEN, AS CONCEIVED by the mediæval Church – the extravagant penitent with the perfume jar, who is also Christ’s warm follower, and witness of His Resurrection – is what theologians call, or used to call (nowadays they have a much more repellent vocabulary) a [type](#). That is, she is not just an individual, but also the pattern of a certain sort of devotion. Everyone who worships Christ with such abandon and warmth and opulence resembles Mary Magdalen, and to contemplate her is a way of understanding our own liturgical practice better.

But Simon the Pharisee is also a type. There are always men, often religious grandees like Simon himself, who feel what he felt and say what he said about religious gestures. Simon is himself inclined to what he would call dignified restraint, and we would call coldness. He disapproves, indeed he is sincerely shocked, by Mary Magdalen’s caressing of feet with hair. He finds such luxury of gesture unnecessary, wanton, fleshy, grotesque. In all things, not just worship, his taste is for the spare and minimal. Simon the Pharisee was a niggardly, or as he would say unostentatious, dinner-party host, omitting even the usual Eastern courtesies of a foot-basins for his guests and ritual kisses. No doubt he found such ceremonies old-fashioned fussy.

Now, this contrast between the lavish and the frugal, between the Madgalen and Simon, began early and ended early in the Christian Church. In the first years, Mass was said simply enough. But as soon as the Church

¹¹ Renaissance scholars began the attack on the composite mediæval figure of the Magdalene. Nowadays it’s the feminist theologians who are hot against her; see for instance Susan Haskins’ sensible *Mary Magdalen* (HarperCollins, 1993), or Sandra M. Rushing’s extremely silly *The Magdalene legacy : exploring the wounded icon of sexuality* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1994). If interested in the full-blown mediæval legend, see David Mycoff’s translation of *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo 1989); this contains the delightful news that her *hobby* was perfumry (vi, 201-205). With her siblings Lazarus and Martha, Mary retired after the Resurrection to –somehow this is exactly right – the French Riviera. There she converted Provence, and spent thirty years prolonging her initial act of penance at Christ’s feet.

The Magdalene therefore has three very different rôles in Christian imagination: she is Christ’s most fervent disciple, the one who first discovered the Resurrection; she is the model of all penitents, and is shown brooding over a skull or unkempt hermitess in a ‘desert’ in Provence; and she is the model reformed prostitute. Late mediæval devotion to her in all three guises was intense and enthusiastic, and is due for revival.

had the resources for elaboration and opulence, the Mass became dazzling. Christians wanted the big gesture and the maximum effect. If the Sacrifice was to be offered, let it be offered by priests wearing cloth-of-gold – that is, let the Body of Christ be handled by humans dressed even more sumptuously than the Magdalen was when she handled His feet. If God and man were really together at table (declared mediæval Christians), let there be kisses and kneeling and pouring out of fragrance on an even richer scale than at that dinner in Bethany. Simon the Pharisee can be scandalised by all this physicality if he wants; his sensibility is of no interest to us; for we worship physically what is physical, the presence of God as a Man, the presence of divinity so intimate that It puts Its feet under our table. What rôle can there be for sad, meagre notions of good taste? Let us worship as lusciously as she did.

It can't be a coincidence that devotion to Mary Magdalen swelled as Mass reached a pinnacle of polyphonic splendour at the beginning of the sixteenth century. She summed up the religious spirit of the times.

The Reformation.

FOR THIRTEEN OR FOURTEEN HAPPY CENTURIES after that Bethany dinner-party, Christians had responded to the feast called the Mass as Mary Magdalen did – by profuse and elaborate display. Then came calamity. Simon the Pharisee roused himself, and tried to drive Mary from the table so that he could sit primly with Christ, exchanging grim remarks.

The Reformers were not initially concerned with Church ceremonial. But their gigantic heresy tended to deny the physical presence of Christ in the Mass – indeed, their drift was to belittle the Incarnation altogether. If Christ were not really present at table, there was no point in the embellishments mediæval love, joy and penitence had added to the Eucharistic action. Indeed, splendour of any sort sat badly with their harsh spirits.

Their heresy did not quite ruin the English Church. But it did great damage. The essentials of Catholic doctrine and order were preserved in England, but the mediæval glories were hacked away. Even what little remained of ceremonial decency – candles on the altar (which was sternly called a Table), a surplice (not even a chasuble) on the celebrant, the sign of the cross – was resented by Simon the Pharisee, who was now calling himself Puritanism. *Pshaw!* he exclaimed: *Popery! Mumbo-jumbo! Superstition! Extravagance! Mummery! Baffling twaddle! Harlotry! Excess!* He wanted them abolished. It appeared that he would succeed.

Then there emerged, at the very end of the sixteenth century, the first great Anglican spirit: [Richard Hooker](#). In his writing was first heard the voice of the independent but still Catholic Church of England: sweet-tempered, rational, learned, understatedly devout, witty, orderly, creative, conservative, devoted to the ancient Church but forbearing, as far as possible, with modern error.

It was Hooker who pointed (as I have, plagiarising him) to the figure of Mary Magdalen, sobbing and spilling perfume under Christ's table. Listen, he told his Puritan adversaries:

*Doth not our Lord Iefus Chrifft himfelfe impute the omiffion of fome courteous Ceremonies even in domefticall intertainment to a colder degree of louing affection, and take the contrarie in better part?*¹²

For Christ reproaches Simon for treating Him with such brusque coldness. *I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet . . . Thou gavest me no kiss.* Simon had been a niggardly host himself; how was he to understand Mary's impulse to *maximal* gestures of love? It wasn't enough just to wash Christ's feet, she wanted to wash them with tears; it wasn't enough to wash them, she needed to kiss them; it wasn't enough to dry them, she wanted to dry them with herself; it wasn't enough to soap them, she craved the joy of pouring over them spikenard.

Lovers will understand this better than chilly clerics of Simon's sort, for lovers rejoice to offer each other signs of love which are exhaustive but not exhausting, for they fulfil the impulse of love and refresh the one who receives them and the one who gives.

Simon's dignity was too great for him to offer even the usual social courtesies. Opposite to Simon's spirit is what Hooker called *the contrarie*, the diametric opposite of brusqueness and coldness: the spirit of the Magdalen, who offers not the usual courtesies, but an extreme of courtesy. She has no dignity to compromise, she is not hobbled by neat good taste, she is, rather like us, notorious imperfect. Therefore she offers God made flesh for her sake what is fleshly, and warm, and blatant.

“The omission of some courteous ceremonies.”

¹² *Of the lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie. Eyght Bookes.* By Richard Hooker (London: John Windet 1594; Da Capo Press facsimile, 1971. BV 649 H79), p 158.

TO UNDERSTAND THE MAGDALEN is to understand why the Mass is such a fussy affair, why it seems almost foolishly extreme and almost insanely elaborate, weirdly dramatic and esoteric and over-the-top. To understand pompous Simon the Pharisee is to understand what there are intermittent revolts against lushness in worship.

Hooker won the argument in the English Church. Minimal ritual was maintained, and when the hoarfrost of Reformation thawed in the mid-nineteenth century, the entire mediæval richness of the Mass began to be recovered. Indeed, the Church of England recovered more than she had lost, for in the interim Roman Catholicism had reacted against the Reformation by moving even further into liturgical spectacle, pageantry and display. Anglican worship adopted many of these new riches; ‘Anglo-Catholic’ liturgy (to use that odd term) is quite specifically baroque.

Thus Mary trampled Simon.

But the wiles of evil are sometimes profound. In the 1950s, Simon the Pharisee, turning in his seat, began to murmur to Simon Peter. (Bouts’ painting seems to prophecy such a manoeuvre.) The heir of Peter, the Pope in Rome, let himself be struck the Modernist mood, which was shocked by the opulence of the Catholic Church, and longed for the functional starkness of airports. *Mumbo-jumbo! Superstition! Extravagance!* murmured Simon to Simon: *Mummery! Baffling twaddle! Harlotry! Excess! What does your twentieth century Church need with such over-elaboration? I myself welcomed Christ to table without those meaningless antique gestures of foot-washing and kissing: I’m sure He preferred it that way, whatever He said.* It was the Puritan revolt all over again.

Simon listened to Simon, and the Pope’s Vatican Council declared, in a particularly brazen phrase, that the rites of the Church *should be* ‘characterised by a noble simplicity’, that they should be without needless repetition and comprehensible to first-time visitors. To call the modernised rites noble is just advertising. They are stark. Needless repetition is the very mark of love: are lovers satisfied with one neat kiss? What is instantly clear to casual visitors cannot be very profound. Rich and studied devotion has given way to bleak politeness (the modernist prayers read like office memos). And Hooker has told us what drives this liturgical revolution: not just bad taste, but *a colder degree of loving affection.*

Light and warmth.

UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, the Church Catholic in all her branches celebrated the rites of salvation with great complexity. Roman Catholics celebrated Mass in Latin, with an elaborate ceremonial polished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries until it dazzled the eye, and made opera seem sparse. Anglicans used the stately English of the 1662 Prayer Book (language which sounded old and deliberately archaic even in 1662), and as much as they dared of the Roman ceremonial. The East worshipped Christ in rich old languages like Church Slavonic, long since dead in common use. Everywhere veneration was complicated, graceful, strange, delightful, esoteric, and good fun. Liturgy was full of warmth, and Mary Magdalen with her perfumes and damasks was at home.

Of course some of this elaboration could make a worshipper smile. Every so often the priest himself (a grown man in an embroidered sack, solemnly flicking people with water from a metal bucket, or chanting glaring words in a language never spoken outside church) might feel a spasm of embarrassment. But there was nothing wrong with that. Any activity really worth doing must sometimes appear [ridiculous](#); any food with a lively enough taste to be intensely desired therefore cannot invariably be desired. We can always eat bread; we cannot always face oysters or curry; curry sometimes makes us grimace – not because there is anything wrong with curry. The extreme richness of the rites was not excessive just because it troubled queasy sensibility. Ritual ought to be bright and distinctly-flavoured. Life is too brief and vivid to defer to queasiness.

Again, it was possible to feel impatience with the [laciness](#) of ritual. Wouldn't the Mass seem more forceful if it more solid and blunt, more straightforward and overt? No: for as Chesterton points out,

the promptest and boldest agencies are also the most fragile or full of sensibility. The swiftest things are the softest things. A bird is active, because a bird is soft. A stone is helpless, because a stone is hard. The stone must by its own nature go downwards, because hardness is weakness. The bird can of its nature go upwards, because fragility is force. In perfect force there is a kind of frivolity, an airiness that can maintain itself in the air. . . . Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly. This has been always the instinct of Christendom, and especially the instinct of Christian art.¹³

¹³ Chapter vii, 'The Eternal Revolution', in *Orthodoxy*.

Chesterton could write that in 1908; it isn't true a century later. Since the mid-twentieth century Rome's sensibility, and which it Rome's worship, has turned stone-blunt. The Anglican Communion has largely followed suit.

Attendance has plummeted in the West like a stone: even people who say they like the new, stark liturgies cannot in fact bring themselves to assist with them week by week. But that is not the main objection to the liturgical revolution. The objection is that the spirit of Mary – the fragrant, extravagant, operatic, impulsive, courteous, gesticulating, gallant Magdalen – has been driven out of Christian worship. Dour, arrant, clipped old Simon the Pharisee is in the saddle.

In this parish, merely by standing still and maintaining what all Christians once enjoyed, we appear almost revolutionary. For our ritual remains sensuous, total, enveloping – and therefore, as an enemy like Simon would say, fussy, lacy and ridiculous. But e don't mind being snubbed by him

Let's take final look at Mary Magdalen in Bouts' painting.¹⁴ Her clothes are frilly and her posture ridiculous. It's easy to see why Simon the Pharisee is disgusted, and Simon Peter shocked. But their views matter a good deal less than the views of Christ, who accepts the Magdalene's sensuous and extreme worship with His blessing, and with a promise that such sensuousness would meld with His worship forever.¹⁵

So much for our interlude. On with the offertory! Now the spirit of extreme gesture is to be indulged to the fullest: now we shall out-Magdalen the Magdalen!

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¹⁴ Dieric Bouts the Elder, *Christ in the House of Simon* (1440s, oil on wood, 40.5 x 61 cm; Staatliche Museen, Berlin). I downloaded it from http://gallery.euroweb.hu/html/b/bouts/dirk_e/. Do go online to see it in colour, and also the rest of Bouts' devout work.

¹⁵ The substance of this chapter was given as a talk to the Richard Hooker Society at Westcott House, Cambridge, 22nd January, 2002. I'm grateful to Dr Andrew Davison for arranging that lecture.